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Societal Dynamics in Personal Networks

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INTRODUCTION

In studying ageing and personal networks, the dominant focus has been towards a presumed reduction in social ties over the later stages of the life course. Life events such as retirement and widowhood, death or incapacity of network members result in the loss of personal ties; limitations arising from health problems may further reduce possibilities for maintaining relationships. However, not all older people are confronted with a shrinking network. This chapter examines the variations characteristic of personal networks in later life. It begins by reviewing the concept of the social network with subsequent sections focusing on the interrelationship between societal dynamics and personal networks. Recent advances in the study of network change have enabled a stronger focus on societal influences on personal networks beyond individual characteristics (Thomése et al., 2005). Personal networks are embedded in a dynamic social context. The argument presented in this chapter is that the nature of personal relationships is subject to societal change, and that recent changes will affect the characteristics of social networks in the future, including the networks of older people. We introduce societal dynamics by describing three societal shifts that are pertinent to networks and network change in late life. Following this, it is argued that theoretical concerns are embedded in a societal context and the main theoretical perspectives in this area are examined in respect of their approach to network change. The chapter then revisits the analysis of network change in late life and concludes with an overview of possible developments affecting future generations.

INTRODUCTION TO PERSONAL NETWORKS

There is a long-standing tradition in the field of gerontology devoted to studying the personal networks of older people (Phillipson, 2004). Networks are regarded as a source of support, contributing to older people's functioning and well-being. A personal network is generally defined as all persons (network members) with whom a focal individual has a direct relationship. The network approach starts with the proposition that social actors are interdependent and that their relationships channel information, affection, support, and other resources. The structure of those relationships both restricts and creates opportunities for behavior. The personal networks of individuals reflect their social opportunities and personal choices to maintain a specific set of relationships with relatives, neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and so on (Adams and Allan, 1998; Hall and Wellman, 1985). This means, first, that relationships are tied to larger social structures, creating opportunities and restraints in the formation and meaning of personal relationships (Entwisle et al., 2007). It also means that personal relationships are not isolated from each other (Thomése et al., 2003). Researchers have too often studied the personal relationships of individuals without taking the linkages between various network members into account. However, network members do not function independently of each other. It is crucial to regard the interaction between the focal individual and one network member in relation to the interaction with other network members. For example, which of the adult children is to provide support for an elderly parent might be the outcome of a family meeting at which they decide to rotate caregiving tasks. If linkages between these relationships and between network members are also taken into account, the scope is extended to broader social structures around the focal person.

Network research in gerontology expanded in the 1980s, in the wake of findings showing the importance of social support for several measures of physical and mental health (Berkman and Syme, 1979; Caplan, 1974). The term ‘social networks’ had previously been used in gerontology to describe groups of people interacting in face-to-face situations (Lowenthal and Robinson, 1976), focusing on the older adults’ ties to society through participation in networks and social roles (Rosow, 1967). The central issues and concepts in subsequent gerontological network research increasingly reflect the social support approach, which links personal relationships to health and well-being. Networks are considered a source of social support, with

the focus on disentangling the ways in which networks, relationships, and support are beneficial to ageing individuals. House and Kahn (1985) were among the first to distinguish the *structural* properties of networks and relationships from their *existence* and *functions.* These three conceptualizations - existence, structure, and function - each map different parts of the personal network (Broese van Groenou and van Tilburg, 2007) and will now be discussed in turn.

The existence of (formal) relationships is the focus within the *social integration approach.* Networks consist of more or less institutionalized relationships: for example, those with relatives, co-workers, fellow members of organizations, and neighbors. Researchers who use these relationships as their point of departure take living arrangements, household composition, marital status, or employment status as criteria for network membership (e.g., Berkman and Syme, 1979). Others include relationships that are to some degree close or important to the focal person (Kahn and Antonucci, 1980).

In the *structural approach* it is recognized that people are embedded in various interlocking structures. The network is one of these structures, in which supportive and non-supportive interactions both occur (Knipscheer et al., 1995). The focus is on a multiplex system of partly overlapping sets of relationships in which interactions take place on a regular basis. This indicates to what degree older people are socially involved and the number of relatives, friends, co-workers, and so on, with whom contact is maintained.

The *functional approach* typically addresses the network as a source of support to the individual, such as the older person in need of assistance. Studies define a social network as a set of persons with whom specific types of support are exchanged (Fischer et al., 1977). This exchange might pertain both to support receiving and support giving. This approach is biased against the many relationships in which very little if any support is exchanged.

NETWORK DYNAMICS IN LATE LIFE - THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

There is great diversity and change in personal networks in later life (van Tilburg, 1998). Networks are currently understood from three different perspectives: (1) social and personal transitions in later life; (2) changes in the expected returns from relationships within the network; and (3) individual proactive management of personal relationships.

The first perspective offers a life-course view (see Chapter 1). This view conceptualizes an individual as surrounded by what has been termed a '*convoy'* of persons with whom he or she develops relationships from early childhood to old age (Kahn and Antonucci, 1980). During the life course, some relationships end due to (role) transitions (e.g., divorce, death of the spouse, changing jobs), while other relationships may last a lifetime. New members may enter the network as a result of (re) marriage (including relatives, friends, and acquaintances of the new partner), a new job (co-workers and the people they are associated with), or becoming a parent or grandparent (the next generation, but also relationships that emerge in the new role as parent or grandparent). Thus, people enter old age with a personal network that reflects earlier transitions affecting their opportunities and individual choices to maintain and develop relationships. Unfettered by employment obligations and the responsibility for children at home, older people have greater opportunities to organize and structure their social lives. On the other hand, a decline in health may impose restrictions upon older adults' capacities to engage in interaction with others. Hearing problems can limit conversational exchanges, reduced physical mobility can limit participation in shared activities, and cognitive impairment may limit exchange of ideas with others. Role changes and restricted capacities in later life are expected to reduce non-kin relationships and emphasize the importance of family relationships in the network.

The second perspective, based on exchange theory, explains network change in later life from changes within specific relationships. People constantly evaluate their relationships and prefer balanced support, i.e., they give support with the expectation of receiving something in return at some point in time (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). If the receiving party is not able to return the support and it is clear that this will not change in the future, the exchange of support may decline. Older adults may become more dependent on others, lacking the ability to perform certain tasks themselves. The existing balance in their relationships may be disrupted, introducing strain and discomfort; imbalance results in the decline of supportive exchanges with older adults, particularly within less close relationships. The deterioration of balance within relationships could be prevalent among older adults, especially when restricted capacities in later life prevent older adults from investing in other people by providing them with instrumental support. Imbalance does not always end in the termination of a relationship, however, as disparity in support to needy older adults can be normatively accepted and even viewed as desirable.

From the third perspective, network change results from alterations in an individual's motivation. This perspective has been developed, for example, by socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992). With increasing age, the time horizon for the individual becomes more limited, and emotional regulation becomes the most important drive for social interaction. As a result, older people disengage from

peripheral and role-guided relationships because the emotional engagement with core network relationships is viewed as more rewarding. This predicts selective shrinking in network size with age. People feeling near to death deliberately discontinue their less close relationships, reduce the emotional closeness with many others, and increase the emotional closeness with core network members such as kin and friends.

It can be concluded that dynamics in the personal networks of older people are related to changes in situational and personal characteristics. A network reflects individual transitions, relationship norms, structural constraints on contact with others, and personal characteristics. In studying networks in later life, it is recommended to relate changes in network features to changes in situational, as well as personal, characteristics of older people. However, changes in personal networks cannot be studied in isolation from macrosocial trends that create individual opportunities to design and maintain a personal network. The way macro-social structures are related to network dynamics will be addressed in the remaining sections of this chapter.

NETWORK DYNAMICS IN SOCIETAL CONTEXT

People's behavior and the network structures around them are related to a variety of characteristics of the macro-social environment. This is particularly recognizable when the environment changes. One can think of specific periods in history that affect personal networks, like the former communist regimes creating neighborhoods of mixed social composition aimed at creating friendship between classes (Völker and Flap, 1997) or the occurrence of a natural disaster such as a flood that affected the help exchanged within networks (Tyler, 2006). Societal conditions and changes also play an influential role in determining the structure and function of personal networks. In the following, we will discuss three important changes influencing the structure of social networks.

Before doing so, it is important to acknowledge that the theoretical description of society is itself subject to wider societal changes. Theories are not just abstract statements on empirical facts and associations between phenomena, but may be viewed as a discourse (Marshall, 1999). The value of theory is that it allows us to generalize about particular cases of issues and problems that we want to understand. However, not only might the events themselves and their causes and consequences be affected by changes in the social context in which they appear but also our understanding of them is bounded by historical conditions. Theories themselves reflect the society at the time of origin and initial development (Hagestad and Dannefer, 2001).

Two theories continue to transmit powerful messages to periods that no longer correspond to their original context of Western society half a century ago: the disengagement paradigm formulated by Cumming and Henry (1961) and the modernization thesis of Cowgill and Holmes (1972). The disengagement paradigm described society withdrawing from the older person; investments in a person's human capital are discontinued because of their diminished productivity. The withdrawal is presented as mutual: people withdraw from active involvement in society just as society withdraws or ‘disengages’ from the individual. The disengageing process starts with a shift in self-perception, results in less contact and interaction with others, and aims to prepare the individual for the end of life. The theory reflects the societal view of old people at the time as passive, uninteresting, and uninterested in the world around them (Achenbaum, 2009; Ajrouch et al., 2007). The dominant view on late life as a phase of withdrawal has hampered a thorough analysis of the opportunities and specific characteristics of old age as it has been developing in the past decades. For example, a new third life phase has emerged between working life and late old age (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005; Laslett, 1996). In this period, good health and much free time could stimulate the extension and deepening of one's personal relationships in various ways. For example, grandparents can play a more active role in the lives of their grandchildren. Such an increased role for grandparents may be optional in some cases, but in others it may be asked for by dual-earner children or even necessitated by their problems. This is not to say that the third age is only a period full of options. As employment is one of the pillars of the welfare state, jobless people - whether they are young or old - experience a degree of exclusion from society (Offe, 2000). Furthermore, old non-working people lose contact with younger generations, and, for many, such contact is only maintained within the family context (Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2006). The disengagement paradigm fits with a shrinking social world of older people. However, it does not allow for viewing late life in terms of an expansion in social networks or new opportunities.

The modernization thesis also predicts society withdrawing from older people, but presents this as arising purely from societal dynamics. Systemic changes associated with modernization, such as urbanization, the increased rate of social change, and cultural changes, appear to make older people redundant, forcing them back into the realm of family life, where they also experience a degree of isolation. This thesis of exclusion matches the general concern with the effects of social change on the family in postwar societies. Although the theory has been challenged by empirical findings, the idea of older people being ‘abandoned’ continues to inform the study of family life (Aboderin, 2004). The perception that older people suffer from a lack of meaningful contacts remains widespread in research and public debate (Tornstam, 2007).

In terms of network dynamics, both theories depict older adults as increasingly isolated from their direct personal environment and broader social structures. Both see societal requirements as a cause of this isolation, with the disengagement paradigm stressing the voluntary side, and the modernization thesis focusing on the unintended and undesirable aspects. This socially induced change puts older people in a dependent exchange position in their relationships, and is accompanied by active withdrawal from a broad range of personal relationships. In the following we will point to some recent societal developments relevant to the size, composition, and content of personal networks. Three areas of societal developments can be distinguished that have continued relevance for network dynamics: changing family structures, the emergence of welfare states, and the weakening of the geographical foundation of networks. Based on empirical data, we counter the biased interpretation of changes in these areas as contributing to detachment from social relationships in late life.

Changing family structures

As highlighted in Chapter 6, one of the most profound and dramatic demographic changes that Western societies has witnessed during the 20th century has been the ageing of the population. It has resulted in both longer years of linked lives between generations and longer lives as grandparents, parents, and children than ever before in human history (see Chapter 14). At the same time, birth rates have decreased in many Western countries, lowering the number of siblings, children, and extended kin such as aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. Developments such as increasing divorce rates in the final decades of the 20th century have also affected family structures in many Western countries (Chambers et al., 2009).

In many countries, however, these developments have not yet led to a dramatic decrease in the number of kin available to current generations of older people compared to some decades ago. The rate of decline in birth rates has varied considerably across Western countries with, for example, an early start in Italy and a late start in Ireland and the Netherlands where birth rates are still relatively high. Childlessness has decreased from the generations born in the beginning of the 20th century up to generations born in 1950 in many countries - a change which will be visible among later generations (Rowland, 2007). Divorce primarily affects intergenerational relationships of fathers, but they remarry more often than divorced mothers and relationships with stepchildren might begin to replace those with biological children (Lye, 1996; van der Pas and van Tilburg, 2010).

Moreover, at least within the limits of Western family structures, family life may not be all that susceptible to social change. Silverstein et al. (1998) contrasted parent-child relationships among very old parents in rural Wales to those of parents in the urbanized United States; these were taken to represent two stages of modernization. Contrary to expectations, relatively few differences were observed. There were more geographically close relationships among the Welsh parents and the contact frequency was higher, but there were no differences observed in the amount of support exchanged. A British study comparing networks of older people across a period of around 50 years concluded that children still represented a major part of the social networks of older people (Phillipson et al., 2001). Vollenwyder et al. (2002) compared changes in contact frequency between older people and their families in two Swiss surveys carried out in 1979 and 1994. Despite a decrease in proximity of children, they observed an increase in contact across cohorts, which can partly be explained by structural factors, such as a decline in family size and improvements in means of communication. Van der Pas et al. (2007) examined relationships of young-old parents and their adult children over two successive cohorts in the Netherlands. Parents of the later cohort had more contact and support exchanges with their children than the earlier cohort, revealing that families have not declined in importance.

The results of these studies revealed that, as concluded earlier by Troll (1971), the level of intergenerational contact has not substantially declined in the second half of the previous century. If intergenerational contact has changed at all, it appears to be toward an improvement in the quality of contact. The intergenerational relationship remains at the heart of the family and is an important source of contact and support (see Chapters 13 and 14).

The emergence of welfare states

Beside the impact of demographic changes on current generations of older people, the emergence of welfare systems has affected families' traditional functions, shifting responsibility from the family and personal network to a public solidarity system. One of the core issues in mid-20th century sociology (e.g., Litwak and Szelenyi, 1969) has been concern about the possible detrimental effects of modern welfare states on informal solidarity. The so-called *'crowding out'* hypothesis states that within welfare states increased levels of services provided to citizens lead to substitution effects: citizens will decrease their own efforts to provide services (Abrams and Schitz, 1978). Alternative interpretations of the relation between government action and actions by citizens have been put forward. First, the '*crowding in'* effect assumes that if the state donates more, the citizen will also increase his donation. For example, Künemund and Rein (1999) used a central concept from social exchange theory to understand the relation between the actions of a government and the actions of an individual. Exchange relationships assume reciprocity

between giving and receiving. If the state gives to an individual, his position will be strengthened and he, for his part, will have the possibility to give to other citizens. According to the reciprocity concept, a citizen who receives will want to give back. The individual in need will thus be supported in two ways: namely, by the state and by the citizen. Secondly, there is the possibility that donations by the citizen and donations by the state are entirely unrelated. The literature about intergenerational relationships assumes that there are personal motives, such as affection, intimacy, and love, as well as normative motives, such as filial responsibility expectations, which induce children to provide care to their parents independent of other sources of aid (Künemund and Rein, 1999). Finally, Kohli (1999) observed that the emergence of state welfare ruled out financial support from adult children to their parents, but he disputed the idea that this damaged intergenerational support. In contrast, the inter-generational flow of resources continues, but by means of monetary transfers and bequests from older people to their children. Kohli suggests in fact that public old-age security has enabled new links between family generations.

Various types of welfare states have been compared according to the degree to which citizens give to individuals in need. Motel-Klingebiel et al. (2005), in one such study, used cross-national data to examine differences in the informal help and formal help given to old persons in various countries having different types of welfare states. After elimination of a number of personal characteristics, there appeared to be substantial differences in the degree to which elderly people receive formal help. Compared to Germany, a conservative-corporatist regime, much more formal help is given in social-democratic Norway, while far less formal help is given in Mediterranean Spain. The researchers did not find such differences for help given by the family. The researchers concluded that 'crowding out' does not occur. We have to add that this evidence pertains to a period in which welfare states were expanding. In such a situation, assistance from family members does not appear to come under direct pressure.

We conclude that the emergence of welfare states, in particular those within Europe with a high level of help provided by the state, did not directly affect informal support systems. Both systems appear to have their own dynamics, while care provided by the state supplements rather than replaces help given by family or other personal network members. At the end of the 20th century, welfare state provisions in Europe and the United States were reduced in accordance with the assumption that this would lead to increased private and informal help. In these more individualized societies, people with few material and social resources are under high pressure to ensure that their needs are met. We return to this issue in the next section of this chapter.

Geographical disembedding of networks

There is a continuous debate within the social sciences regarding the apparent decline of local communities in urbanized society - aptly called the 'community question' (Wellman, 1979). *'Community lost'* arguments point to the disintegration of local communities due to increased residential mobility, leading to instability in local relationships. Rather than focus on relationships in the neighborhood, people have geographically dispersed networks and they exchange support mainly with non-local network members. According to *'community saved'* arguments, close local communities continue to exist in urban settings, especially in lower-class neighborhoods where relatives and friends live at close distance and where there is intense exchange of support between all people involved. Wellman (1979) showed that in metropolitan Toronto the most common type of community could be termed 'liberated': people do have local ties, but these ties are of limited importance because people focus more on relationships outside the neighborhood for support and socializing. Moreover, Wellman argued that neighborhood or shared location could no longer be seen as a priori context for community. In his view, communities are personalized, consisting of individuals' personal networks. The members of these 'personal communities' can be located anywhere, as their common denominator is not the neighborhood, but their tie to the focal person, or anchor, in the network. In this sense, local communities have been lost for many people.

The geographical dispersion of personal networks is recognized in various studies, although empirical tests of the assumed network loss for older adults are scarce. We have already pointed to research that reported on the dispersion of families. McPherson et al. (2006) analyzed the size of discussion networks, i.e., the number of people who have someone to talk to about matters that are important to them, in 1985 and 2004. Among adults of various age categories there was a relatively large loss of discussion partners, and the largest losses were observed among network members from the community and neighborhood. Instability of neighbor relationships has also been demonstrated among older adults (Martire et al., 1999). However, this does not imply a general decay of local communities, or a special vulnerability of older adults to neighborhood change. Krause (2006) found no direct effect of neighborhood deterioration on support received by older adults. More generally, Ajrouch et al. (2007) analyzed cohort changes on the basis of three nationally representative samples in the United States. Based on data from 1957, 1976, and 1992 there was no evidence for a decrease in contact among people aged 65 or older. Middle-aged people, however, had low levels of contact. The decrease in contact among this age category over successive cohorts might be explained by the increase in multiple roles and the amount of time middle-aged people spent in each role.

In sum, it appears that the geographic disembedding of networks has had some impact upon personal networks. Many local communities disappeared and the immediate environment acquired less significance as a foundation of personalties. However, social life within a local context remains alive for many older people and personal relationships are initiated and maintained within this context.

SOCIETAL CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS: A REASSESSMENT

Available empirical evidence does not point to an unequivocal loss of network availability for older adults in contemporary developed societies, nor to any other straightforward social loss in later life. This may be seen as a refutation of the modernization and disengagement interpretations of relationships in later life. At the same time, we have observed societal-induced changes in personal relationships. In order to understand the social processes that are currently affecting networks in late life, and to gain insight in the direction these networks will be taking in the near future, we propose to look at network dynamics from the perspective of 'accentuated modernization', a perspective developed for personal relationships by Allan (2001) and for later life by Phillipson and Biggs (1998), Gilleard and Higgs (2005), and Leach et al. (2008).

Rather than discard the significance of the three processes described in the previous section for personal networks in late life, or reject the relevance of modernization, we argue that these are major manifestations of what Giddens (1990) termed 'de-traditionalization', and Beck (1992) called 'individualization'. Although not identical (Beck et al., 1994), both point to the loss of constraining power from traditional social structures and communities. Traditional forms of bonding, including postwar welfare states, both protected and constrained people. They protected people because social relationships were naturally available from occupying more specific roles such as family member, employee, or neighbor. For example, being a family member consequentially resulted in social relationships with family members. These relationships were structured and constrained by familial norms and prescribed behaviors. Deviation could lead to eviction from the family. As an example, one might consider the situation of a gay person. Coming out could be evaluated as contrary to usual family life, resulting in losing kin relationships. The same would probably occur in his or her community-based network (church, neighborhood). In a de-traditionalized situation, the gay person might develop a network fitting with his or her own preferences, and not be bound to the dominant norms of a traditional community.

However, this leaves an individual somewhat alone in the management of his or her life. The implied liberation from traditional bonds has a downside in the potential shortage of resources to accomplish this task. Bauman (2000) describes this new phase of modernity as 'liquid', pointing especially to the disconnection between macro-social and structural constraints on the one hand, and individual experience on the other. The social constraints governing behavior escape individual control, as with health hazards or economic prospects. A traditional situation where constraining agencies were generally nearby and visible has been replaced by constraining agencies on a higher level such as ethnic diversity in a neighborhood, or, as in our earlier example, covert discrimination by employers or insurance companies. Protection from surrounding structures, such as family, church, or associations, is no longer given. This fluidity of the social context leaves individuals with a fundamental incapability to realize their own autonomy.

This type of modernization continues to affect personal networks. Indeed, personal relationships increasingly become the focal point of these developments, as other more structurally embedded social bonds become fluid. According to Allan (2001), the significance of friendship and other informal relationships has increased rather than decreased because of the more fragmented and less predictable social life people are leading in modern societies. The more individualized identities and biographies, giving individuals a greater scope beyond traditional social structures, increase the complexity of subjectivities and lifestyles (Giddens, 1991).

Whereas in the past personal relationships may have been perceived as both obligatory and rigid, they have transformed over time so that while personal relationships are still perceived as critically important, they are now likely to be thought of as both more flexible and voluntary. Close ties involve more options and a flexibility of roles that may be perceived as less binding. Network structures are now more diffuse and less certain. Structural constraints on the formation of networks persist; work and income, for example, condition the opportunities to find and maintain relationships. But the association between social positions and network structure becomes more complex, and many personalized contradictions are also articulated in personal relationships. The latter is the most obvious in women's responsibilities in informal care for younger and older relatives: the systemic, and often contradictory, demands for caregivers and employees appear in the lives of women as personal choice between work and family.

From this viewpoint of accentuated modernization we can now return to the three developments discussed in the previous section (i.e., changes in families, welfare states, and geographical disembedding), and re-evaluate their impact on network dynamics for current and future older adults.

Changing family structures revisited

We concluded that the changed family structures had not created a decline in the importance of the family. However, the loosening of the structural basis of the personal network will almost certainly affect family networks. More complex family structures are becoming visible, and are less reliant upon traditional rules of belonging. Higher rates of re-partnering after a first union create a variety of stepfamilies. Riley (1983) referred to this new family structure as a 'matrix of latent relationships,' a network potential that can be activated when appropriate. An increasing proportion of older adults have experienced diverse marital transitions, which have affected the availability and structure of their kinship networks. Remarriage or re-partnering, particularly when parents have both biological and stepchildren, creates a new family structure where family norms and obligations are less clearly defined and understood than in first-marriage families. Intergenerational relationships are increasingly diverse and are embedded in changed family structures (Bengtson et al., 2003). These new structures have predominantly been created since the 1970s among middle-aged people - people who will become the next generation of older people.

The changing demographics of families resulted in increasing insecurity about the content of these relationships. The smaller number of children, the disappearance of co-residence, and the emergence of stepfamilies contribute to increasing uncertainty as to whether a child is available for frequent contact and the exchange of support. For example, it will not be obvious that the stepchild takes the role of biological children when the step-parent becomes more dependent and needs care (van der Pas, and van Tilburg, 2010). Whether stepchildren will provide help and care will not specifically depend on their role as child, but on the shared history, the personal investments made within the relationship, and the contact that was built it will be shaped in the context of normative expectations within the peer group or within society in general. Our thesis is that it will be increasingly unpredictable from the existence of specific family relationships whether essential functions in the daily lives of older people will be fulfilled. People who have material, personal, and social resources are well equipped to cope with this uncertainty. However, new and complex family structures prevail more among economically, personally, or socially vulnerable people like divorced people and single parents.

Changes in the welfare state revisited

We discussed whether the emergence of welfare states has eroded primary functions of personal networks in the exchange of support. The personal responsibility in the context of welfare state arrangements has been a feature of research (Beck et al., 1994). The reshuffling of public and private responsibilities may have two major consequences for personal networks.

First, there will be a stronger emphasis on personal responsibility to initiate and maintain personal networks as a form of social capital. This emphasis on the utility of personal relationships may be at odds with the increasing emotional expectations of personal relationships. Personal relationships are increasingly directed toward intimacy, personal fulfillment, and support. Receiving help, and also providing help, is not obvious; rather, reciprocity of help is maintained as part of the relationship's history. With the weakening of traditional institutions it will be less certain that the needs of the individual will be met within the broader personal network. The traditional social structure directed to mutual instrumental help, which has disappeared, did fit better with a reduced level of governmental welfare provision than does the contemporary and foreseen individualized behavior directed on intimacy, personal fulfillment, and emotional support. People who are vulnerable in any respect might fall victim under the new social conditions in contemporary welfare states.

Secondly, the increasing reliance on individual responsibility may lead to a decrease of welfare state support to older adults as a category (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005; Walker, 2000). Instead, individual life-course management may come at the basis of welfare policy, making individuals responsible for providing for their needs in late life, through insurances, prophylaxis, and, again, personal network management. At the same time, basic social economic and health inequalities continue to persist throughout the life course and even increase with age (Chappell and Penning, 2005; Dannefer, 2003). The basic capacities needed to manage one's own life and deal with an increasingly complex environment are unequally distributed, often along social class distinctions, which again puts older adults at risk of becoming victims of modernization - not because of their advanced age, but because of the invisibility of structural inequalities among age peers. Thus, withdrawal of the welfare state may amplify basic social class differences over the life course, by boosting the process of cumulative advantage-disadvantage (Dannefer, 2003; Polivka, 2000).

Geographical disembedding of networks revisited

Strongly related to the loosening of the role-based character of personal relationships is the loosening of the geographical basis of relationships. With increasing mobility, networks have transformed from being part of local communities to virtual communities. In a globalizing world many relationships are not maintained on a local but on a personal basis. However, there are also signs of localization. Some studies

on embeddedness of people, in particular from the working class, have revealed stable patterns of social life rooted in place. Wellman (2002) distinguishes between the more traditional networks consisting of fellow members of the few groups to which people belong, networked individualism with permeable boundaries, and 'glocalized' networks based upon shared interests, with clusters of individuals rooted in shared kinship and locality. Among future older generations, not all traditional networks will disappear. Across individual time, people's lives will often be a mixture of both types of networks. Phillipson (2007) points to inequalities that are involved in these network types as a consequence of globalization: whereas some older adults (the 'elected') profit from new means for occupying an ever larger world, others (the 'excluded') become prisoners of their local communities, often bereft of resources to influence their direct environment.

CONCLUSIONS

For the study of network dynamics in later life we identified three different perspectives: changes in roles and transitions in later life; the changes in the expected returns from relationships within the network; and individual proactive management of personal relationships. The first perspective embraces the idea that transitions in life trigger changes in the personal network. Many of these transitions were role-based. The perspective emphasizes that networks in old age on the one hand reflect the transitions in previous life stages and on the other hand are guided to a lesser extent by role expectations. In this context we discussed a number of developments. Since networks are decreasingly guided and constrained by roles, our expectation is that there will be more variety and less predictability in responses to life transitions.

The emergence of a third life phase in which older people continue to have strong physical and cognitive capacities has consequences for the exchange perspective. Gerontology has already changed from a view of older people as predominantly dependent on the support received from other people to a view in which the giving of support is important as well. However, in current and future times many older people will be able to be predominantly providers of support up to high ages. Investments in personal relationships increase in order to enjoy life and to increase the meaning of old age. Older people will start new activities and initiate new social relationships. Moreover, they will have the intention and capacities to develop these relationships into members of the personal network. When these people arrive at the fourth phase of life they may profit from these investments, which may temper the deterioration of network relationships due to increasing incapacities.

The guiding idea within the third perspective is that individuals are motivated to develop and maintain emotional engagement within personal relationships. A selective shrinking in network size with age is predicted because older people disengage from peripheral and role-guided relationships. In this chapter we argued that people in any phase of their life will stress the importance of emotional engagement and that personal networks will move away from being derived from someone's position in society. It is no longer the limited time horizon of older adults that causes this development. Thereby, the structure and functions of older adults' personal network will be increasingly similar to that of people of younger ages.

The developments we described only partially touch the contemporary cohorts of older people. Role- and locally-based networks will continue to be important in the lives of many older people. One reason for this might be that not all members of these cohorts were and will be equipped by socialization or training to develop and maintain networks separate from roles and locality. A more important reason, however, is that many personal relationships were initiated within the context of roles and locality and may fulfill the needs of people in old age.

Cohorts of older adults born around World War II will be markers of a transformation to late modernity. In a sociological sense, a new generation emerged that set a new and distinct course through adult life (Gilleard and Higgs, 2005; Leach et al., 2008). Raised in a historical period characterized by traditional patterns, they matured in the 1960s and 1970s when modern patterns were not yet common and developed. In many respects, these cohorts were increasingly expected, amongst others urged by the following generation of their children, to transform personal networks into a modern fashion. These generations will enter old age in the decades to come.

Our expectations signify a change in structural embeddedness of people's network. Where popular and also scientific descriptions often emphasize the loss of embeddedness, we have stressed the changed character of embeddedness. Our main thesis is a weakening of role guidance in networks and an increase in the personalization of networks, contributing to greater diversity among older adults. Empirically, we have recognized a number of developments that fit with this perspective. However, it is less easy to predict the persistence or the speed of such developments among future generations of older people. Empirical evidence on developments in earlier phases of life among adults current in midlife is missing; we therefore do not know how these generations will enter old age. Moreover, the entrance into old age might disrupt or strengthen the proposed developments among these generations. A second source of uncertainty about persistence or speed of the indicated developments among older adults is the lack of guidance from the perspective of accentuated modernization. Central in this perspective is the loss of

constraining power from traditional social structures. The increased personalization of networks, however, is not at all a sign of the absence of structural constraints, leading to a situation where a person is fully free to develop a network that fits with his or her needs. Rather, it will be a situation in which a specific configuration of socially structured situations produces specific boundaries of choices with respect to someone's personal network. Which configurations are important is an important topic for future research.

Further Readings

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